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PENTAGON SILENT ON REYNOLDS DATA

Pearson Linked Air Force to
Report on Baker Witness

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 11 --

The Defense Department refused comment today on whether the Air Force had originated a memorandum containing derogatory information on a witness in the investigation of Robert G. Baker.

The memorandum, purportedly signed by Benjamin W. Fridge, special assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force in charge of manpower and personnel, was circulated confidentially last week by Drew Pearson, the newspaper columnist.

The memorandum went to editors of newspapers carrying his column. The columns published Feb. 5 and 6 contained disparaging statements about Don B. Reynolds, a principal witness before the Senate Rules Committee.

Arthur Sylvester, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, said today that he had no comment on whether such a memorandum existed.

Yesterday, Mr. Sylvester's assistant, Nils Lennarson, did not deny the existence of the memorandum. But he said that the Air Force Secretary, Eugene M. Zuckert, had not requested that such a memorandum be prepared.

Linked to White House

Mr. Fridge could not be reached for comment today. Secretary Zuckert was out of the city and aides in his office would not discuss the incident.

The Pearson column has been linked with an effort by persons within the White House to discredit Mr. Reynolds's testimony concerning the gift of a stereophonic phonograph to President Johnson in 1957, when he was the Senate Democratic leader.

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In transmitting his Feb. 5 column to subscribers last week, Mr. Pearson appended the following "confidential note to editors."

"For your information and because of possible concern over libel in columns on Don B. Reynolds, I am giving for your private information a copy of an Air Force report on Reynolds's background. Information contained in columns is from various sources, though the following is a fairly good summary."

There then followed what purported to be a memorandum from Mr. Fridge. It set out in considerable detail adverse information about Mr. Reynolds while he was in the Air Force from 1941 to approximately 1953. The material was generally similar to what appeared in the two Pearson columns.

Information of this nature from Government personnel files ordinarily carries a high security rating. The chairman of the Rules Committee, Senator B. Everett Jordan, Democrat of North Carolina, complained last week that the committee had not had access to any official data on Mr. Reynolds's background before summoning him for questioning.

Revelations that persons in or close to the White House had had a hand in making available such information to impugn Mr. Reynolds's testimony has caused sharp criticism from Republican members of Congress and from some segments of the press.

The White House press secretary, Pierre Salinger, has denied that anyone in the White House took part in making available the information about Mr. Reynolds.

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